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Sermon—10June18
Mk.3
“Her Worst Enemy”

In the Name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

Romeo and Juliet is a classic love story. But it is also a *tragic* love story.

Romeo and Juliet are young persons from families locked in a bitter feud. They want to marry but can't, because their families won't allow the union. At the end of Shakespeare's play, both of the lovers are dead.

The couple's dilemma is a poignant illustration of the famous saying of Jesus that was quoted in today's Second Lesson: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand."

In the play, the kingdom of Verona, Italy, was rent by a long-standing feud between two families, the Montagues and the Capulets. Romeo was a Montague and Juliet was a Capulet. They would have liked to obey their parents and be loyal to their respective families—but they wanted to act according to their love for each other and get married.

Romeo and Juliet were divided in their loyalties as their city was divided. The result is that none of the relationships in the play—to their families or to each other—none of the relationships survived.

Fortunately, most of us will escape epic tragedies like those imagined by Shakespeare! But few of us will be able to avoid the dilemma of divided loyalty.

Suppose that you are friendly with a married couple, and the couple gets divorced. You know that if you stay in touch with one partner in the couple, you'll be likely to lose the friendship of the other.

If you try to be friends with both of them, you'll be resented by both of them! And the "house" of your friendship with them will fall. In the end, the only thing you can do is choose to be a friend of one partner or the other.

As we heard, the saying that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" comes from the Bible.

In that text, Hebrew scholars have challenged the healing work of Jesus. They claim that Christ is a follower of Satan, and it is therefore by Satan's power that Jesus is able to heal people who are possessed by demons.

Jesus defends himself with a logical argument. He says, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come."

In other words, if Satan really was in charge, and he was empowering Jesus to make people free of demons, he would be undermining his own dark mission—to control people.

In fact, Jesus is healing people of the evil that possesses them. Jesus is battling Satan, not serving him. Therefore, he must be on the side of God.

A house divided against itself cannot stand. This is a simple idea. But the idea can have serious consequences when it comes to affect our souls.

A classic case is the woman who loves two men at the same time and is unable to decide which one to marry.

She can't decide what to do. The two choices swirl around in her head until she feels dizzy! The woman can't choose both. Nor does she want to reject both men and then wind up alone. Pulled in two directions at once, she indeed feels "divided against herself."

Or think of someone who has an ethical dilemma—like a congressman who is tempted to sponsor legislation that he knows will waste taxpayers' money because his sponsorship would give him the votes of a particular group in his district that would benefit from the bill he's supporting.

These issues have become so common that the whole profession of "politician" has been tarnished. Our representatives seem to be perpetually divided against themselves. They lack "integrity;" they lack wholeness.

And it is often the case that the most challenging conflicts we face go on inside our heads. To give another example, they are caused by things that we *remember*.

We can't get certain somber memories out of our minds. Even though the past is over—it is, after all, *past*—still, it keeps us from living in the present.

So where are you divided? What are the conflicts in your soul? Are there issues in your life that you just can't resolve because they seem to draw you in two directions at once?

Well, then, you need to face the fact that, as Jesus said in another place, "No one can serve two masters." Co-leaders of a business almost never function smoothly because employees will feel more attached to one boss than to the other. They won't be able to deal with both equally—that's just human nature.

That's also true of interior conflicts. We can't endlessly debate within ourselves what decision we should make. We can't bemoan a bad decision from the past. We can't bottle up clashing emotions and at the same time enjoy the life God has given us.

But then, once you've decided what your conflicts are, ask yourself another question: "How is God going to help you to resolve these issues?"

One way to answer this spiritual question is to try to see what choices will contribute to your sense of "wholeness"—what choices will contribute to your integrity as a complete human being. Take as an example the woman who is trying to decide between two men she loves.

The woman has first to make up her mind which partner is better for her. And once she has done that, she must put the other relationship behind her. She can't keep comparing the man she chose with the man she rejected. She can't keep fighting old battles within herself.

Indeed, many of our interior conflicts would be resolved if we could learn to just let the past be the past. It's over and done with. As the saying goes, "It's time to move on."

Indeed, as St. Paul said, "*Now* is the accepted time." Now is the time we are called to live in.

All the more reason to seek the integrity that God wants us to have as children of God. All the more reason to overcome the conflicts of the world and the conflicts of the soul. All the more reason to avoid becoming our own worst enemies!

Amen.